DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 654 CE 056 661

TITLE	Off Welfare, into Work.
INSTITUTION	Business Council for Effective Literacy, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	Jan 91
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT	BCEL Newsletter for the Business and Literacy Communities; n26 p1,6-7 Jan 1991
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Vocational Education; Community Organizations; *Demonstration Programs; Displaced Homemakers; Economically Disadvantaged; Employment Programs; *Fatherless Family; *Job Training; Low Income Groups; Minority Groups; *Mothers; One Parent Family; Postsecondary Education; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Welfare Recipients; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	Family Support Act 1988; Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program; Minority Female Single Parent Demonstration Proj; Rockefeller Foundation

ABSTRACT

Concerned with the increasing feminization of poverty, the Rockefeller Foundation launched in 1982 a $12 million welfare-to-work research and demonstration project, presently midway into a 5-year evaluation. The Minority Female Single Parent Demonstration project involved four community-based organizations: Atlanta Urban League (Georgia); Opportunities Industrialization Center of Providence, Rhode Island; Wider Opportunities for Women, District of Columbia; and Center for Employment Training (CET), San Jose, California. Although the first three projects produced discouraging results, CET had dramatic results. Findings were the result of random assignment testing, the most rigorous technique known for measuring the effect of a specific program. After spending less than 1 year in the program, more participants got jobs, better jobs, and substantially higher wages than participants in the other programs, and they did better than a CET control group. CET's success was based on the immediacy of its job training, fitting in needed basic skills instruction. Analysis indicated that CET's program differed from the others by the form in which the training was delivered. Key successful features were no tests; no waiting (open entry and open exit); integrated instruction; ties to the labor market; child care; and one-stop, comprehensive services. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

BCEL BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY

ADULT LITERACY: PROGRAMS • PLANNING • ISSUES Newsletter For The Business & Literacy Communities

NO. 26 January 1991

ED327654

CE 056 661

OFF WELFARE, INTO WORK

Photo by Jock MacDonald, Courtesy of Rockefeller Foundation

According to recent Census figures (March 1990, *Current Population Survey*), some 12 million adult women in the U.S. are trapped in poverty. Of these, 3.2 million are single mothers who are heads of households and have children under age 18 – representing an increase of 30 percent from only a decade ago. Out of concern for the increasing feminization of poverty, the Rockefeller Foundation, in 1982, launched a $12 million welfare-to-work research and demonstration project, which is presently mid-way into a five-year evaluation. Called the *Minority Female Single Parent Demonstration*, it is already clear that the effort has produced results of great significance to funders, legislators, and the literacy and employment training communities.

Not only does the project offer a proven training model to public agencies and education groups that must work together to advance JOBS*, the education provisions of the Family Support Act of 1988, but it gives new weight to the importance of the functional context approach in workforce and workplace programs. Moreover, in pointing to the superiority of "non-sequential, integrated programs" in preparing welfare recipients for work, it suggests a potential new national policy direction, one that runs counter to the conventional wisdom.

The Rockefeller demonstration involved four community-based organizations in as many cities: the Atlanta Urban League, the Opportunities Industrialization Center of Providence, Rhode Island, Wider Opportunities for Women in the District of Columbia, and the Center for Employment Training in San Jose, California. Its purpose: to find the most effective approach for helping low income single mothers get off welfare and into work.

Of the four programs funded, the first three have produced discouraging results. The fourth, at the Center for Employment Training (CET), has had strikingly dramatic results. After spending less than one year in the CET program, more participants have gotten jobs, better jobs, and substantially higher wages than participants in the other three programs, and they have done markedly better than members of a CET control group set up for comparison.

According to program analysts, CET's success is based on the immediacy of its job training. Departing from customary practice, CET teaches job skills without delay – fitting in as needed instruction in the basic reading, math, and English required for competence in a particular job. Program outcomes and goals are specifically geared to the local labor market. Support services for handling such everyday logistical problems as child care and transportation are integrated into the program, and to foster motivation and a personal sense of achievement training is tailored to the individual. The other three programs followed the traditional schooling sequence: requiring remedial basic education as the first step toward qualifying for subsequent job training.

Rapid immersion in job training regardless of the trainee's skills deficiencies is a lesson learned during CET's 23 years of experience. "Anyone who doesn't have bread on the table doesn't have the patience to face a long stretch of classroom basic learning: they become discouraged and quit," says Tony Bustamante of CET. Russell Tershy, CET's director, puts it this way: "The end of the rainbow is not the training or a diploma, but a job and job retention. That's why people come."

(Cont'd on p. 6)

*In the next several years the federal government will be spending up to $1 billion a year for JOBS, to be supplemented by state funds. As the states begin to shape their programs, they will need to draw from the best practices and experience known to the field. The Rockefeller findings are singularly compelling in this regard.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B Spangenberg

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

WELFARE TO WORK

(Cont'd from p.1)

The Role Of Random Assignment

Rockefeller's findings are the result of random assignment testing, the most rigorous technique known for measuring the effect of a specific program. Random assignment, which requires the use of experimental and control groups, has long been the standard classical tool for evaluation in scientific and medical research, and over the last two decades it has come into increasing use in educational and social settings to inform government policymaking. More than 25 years ago, for example, random assignment was used to show that children who watched Sesame Street learned more than those who didn't (which led in turn to increased public and private funding for the program). And the U.S. Congress and several federal departments have begun to use the tool to evaluate government social programs. But Rockefeller's study marks the first time that random assignment has been used in the field of adult literacy, and the first time it has been used to assess "deep skills training and intensive remediation for the welfare population." It can determine with accuracy and reliability, like no other means available, whether a program is achieving its goals.

When random assignment is used, persons are randomly assigned to two groups which are identical in all respects except that one group is permitted to participate in the new program (the participation or treatment group) and the other (the control group) is not. By monitoring the experiences of both groups, it is possible to accurately determine the benefits or effects of the program on those who participated in it, and the effect on those who didn't. Because all else is equal, outcome differences between the two groups provide irrefutable evidence as to the value or the effect of the program. When applied to several groups, as in the Rockefeller demonstration, the tool also yields clear evidence on the comparative outcomes.

[Note: Random assignment is not a method for everyday use. It is costly and difficult to administer, and it requires careful research design and the expertise of outside evaluators. It is a tool to use selectively, to test major assumptions of practice or programs thought to be typical of major policy directions. It is most sensibly used when policymakers are at a crossroads in decision-making and need the information yielded to determine where best to direct scarce resources.]

The Demonstration

Because a main purpose of the Rockefeller project was to reach people, especially minorities, generally not reached by government agencies, the groups it chose to work with were all community-based organizations. All are free of encrusted educational procedure. All by their nature are sensitive to the everyday needs and issues in peoples' lives. All are familiar with local employers in their communities. Applicants at each site were randomly divided into participant and control groups. Those in the participant groups were accepted into the Rockefeller programs, those in the control groups were not. The latter were free to seek training programs elsewhere, as they pleased.

For the research to yield valid results, conditions at all test sites had to be the same. All four CBOs served mainly minority populations, most of whom had never been married and lived alone with their children. Average incomes were close to the poverty level and most were dependent on public welfare. All had low levels of education and little work experience. About half were high school dropouts. All had a need for child care.

At each site the same cluster of comprehensive services was offered: basic education, job skills training, counseling, child care and other logistical support, job-search instruction, and job placement. No particular delivery model was prescribed, however. Each CBO followed its own path in accordance with its individual philosophy, history, and local resource constraints.

At the end of the first year after enrollment, evaluations were conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., an independent social policy research organization. The evaluations covered a total of nearly 4,000 women in both the participant and control groups. The median length of program participation had been five to seven months, varying with the sites. Two basic areas were examined – the impact of the program on its enrollees compared to women in the control groups (one third of whom, it turned out, had pursued other types of training), and the impact of the four programs compared with each other.

CET: The Frontrunner By Far

CET emerged far out in front in both cuts of the evaluation (and follow-up evaluation in process now confirms the earlier findings). It had produced a far higher proportion of women, 10 percent more than the control group (and nearly 50 percent of the program participants), who were working, and earning more as well. On average, their earnings came to $416 a month compared with $283 for the control group members, a difference of 47 percent. Moreover, their hourly wages were 72 cents more on average, or 14 percent higher.

CET also outdistanced the other three programs. There the impact on employment and earnings was close to zero. The women in those programs received a great deal of remedial education and services but they did not make it into job specific skills training or placement. Many were still in those training programs at the end of the first year.

Photo by Jack MacDonald,
Courtesy of Rockefeller Foundation

Why the difference? Close analysis of the four programs revealed a single major aspect in which CET's program differed from the others: essentially, it was the form in which the training was delivered. As this was the only difference, here was the irrefutable evidence for CET's quick and positive results.

According to the evaluators, the key successful features that distinguished CET from its sister programs (and from most traditional school-based models of service) are these:

No Tests. Usually, programs begin with standardized entry tests to screen and sort applicants. CET gives no tests. After a brief exposure to a choice of occupations for known jobs in the local labor market, new students quickly begin hands-on technical training.

No Waiting. Usually, trainees are restricted to scheduled courses of fixed length. CET programs are open entry and open exit, and students are released from study as soon as they can be placed in a job.

Integrated Instruction. Ordinarily, providers follow the sequential pattern of traditional schooling: testing, assigning students to remedial courses, and when a certain level of academic achievement is attained, permitting them to progress to job training. At CET, instruction in basic skills and job skills are intertwined from day one. Say a student chooses to prepare for warehousing work, where jobs involve shipping, receiving, and record-keeping. She begins by learning how to operate forklift equipment and is then introduced to the terminology of the job. This is followed by an assessment period. Here, both student and program assess each other. The student's ability to absorb the material is evaluated by her job trainer and counselor who develop an "employability training plan." This sketches the path of learning needed and the material to be mastered.

In a companion classroom next to the machine shop, occupationally-relevant materials are housed: forms for shipping and receiving, bills of lading, stock inventory forms, and the like. This is where students learn reading, computation, communication, and other job-related skills, fitting the classroom study in between stints on the machines. High school diploma programs are offered and delivered on the premises as well, in the same mode as the basic skills services. Most important at both levels is the opportunity for quick hands-on experience. Learning the technical skill immediately brings the vision of a real job that much closer.

[Note: Some argue that society requires a labor force with higher order thinking and reasoning skills, so that workers can adapt to the increasingly complex demands of today's jobs. To this, CET replies that for its students, training and placement in a job is the crucial first step. It so raises their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment that it is a motivator for more education.]

Ties To The Labor Market. CET trains only for jobs that are in demand. The occupational skills taught are continually examined for their potential, with training streams opened and ended accordingly. The Center keeps current on labor market needs through an industrial advisory board comprised of local business representatives. Its own instructors are technicians with industrial experience. But local

businesses also loan their technicians, stationing them at CET for 6 to 12 months to ensure that technical training is up to date. The ties to local business also function as a de facto job placement network.

Child Care. The care of young children is expensive and hard to find, a crucial issue for female heads of households. CET operates a Montessori child care center on site and was the major child care provider for most of its students. (One other demonstration program also provided on-site child care and all provided some degree of child-care subsidy.)

One Stop Service. Usually, already-strained students are taxed by having to travel from one agency to another for the cluster of diverse services needed to carry them through the school-to-training-to-job progression. At CET, comprehensive services are offered under one roof, with a heavy emphasis on personal counseling. "The fact that people have all these difficulties – legal problems and family disorganization problems – these are legacies of poverty," says Russel Tershy. "So skills training has to be combined with human services and human development. It has to be a holistic approach or it won't work."

Rockefeller cautions that the results of its project must be treated judiciously. The approach would need to be tested in other places with other populations to know whether it is equally effective for groups with other characteristics. But the project sends a clear signal that non-sequential, integrated programs work better in improving the economic and job prospects of hard-to-reach populations, certainly those dependent on welfare. It also puts into question whether the right kinds of measures are presently being used by funders and policymakers to direct program resources.

"What we've got here," says Phoebe Cottingham, assistant director of Rockefeller's Equal Opportunity Division, "is bad news, good news. The bad news is that the dominant strategy across the board, sending people back to school or to traditional schooling to improve their academic skills, does not seem to do much for people who have long left school and want and need jobs immediately. The good news is that there is a practical, holistic solution, sensitive to the person but also keyed to the economy and the labor market, which would make sense for a lot of people, and for businesses and the government too. The next challenge is to get people to think about what they should be doing differently."

CET, incidentally, was started in a church in 1967. While its base is now San Jose, where it operates from its own headquarters in a former junior high school, it has spread to six western states where it operates 30 different training centers. It has a budget of $17 million derived from government grants and corporate donations. Its track record as an effective manpower training model has attracted the interest of the World Bank which wants to export its programs to third world countries. CET is currently preparing to establish a center in Belize, Central America.

(A series of detailed reports on the Rockefeller project, titled *Into the Working World*, are available at no charge from the Rockefeller Foundation. Also available are two videotapes which explain the project. To obtain the materials write to Julie Bauer, Equal Opportunity Program, Rockefeller Foundation, 1133 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036.) ■

Business Council for Effective Literacy
1221 Avenue of the Americas – 35th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10020 (212) 512-2415/2412